

Mr. Durbin: I'm happy to join in this chorus of praise on the seen senator from Massachusetts on the 15,000th vote that he has cast, an historic milestone reached in this body, a milestone reached by only two members, and the other who serves with great distinction the man from West Virginia, Senator Robert C. Byrd, but Senator Edward Moore Kennedy has added his name to this roster of distinction.

He is the 9th child of Joseph and Rose Kennedy, born on February 22nd, 1932, 200 years to the day after George Washington. In a family like the Kennedys, I'm sure that coincidence did not go unnoticed.

Years ago, Ted Kennedy made the senate the focus of his public life. Some say that decision has helped him to become one of the best senators ever to serve in this body. His dedication to principle and his willingness to delve into tough issues really have been the hallmarks of his public service.

In his biography of Senator Ted Kennedy, former "New York Times" reporter Adam Klimer recalls a hearing in the 1960's in the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee on which both Ted and his brother Bobby Kennedy, then-Senator from New York, served. Klimer describes how the two Kennedy's had to wait two hours to question a witness because they were both junior members of the senate at the time.

Bobby Kennedy seemed almost pained by the tedium of sitting there hour after hour waiting his turn. Ted was more patient. Exasperated, Bobby Kennedy leaned over and asked his brother, 'Is this a way I become a good senator? Sitting here and waiting my turn?' Ted replied to his brother, 'Yes'. Bobby shot back, 'How many hours do I have to sit here to become a good senator?' and Teddy said, 'As long as necessary'. When it comes to 15,000 votes, I'm sure that that will be a record that will be hard to match.

But when it comes down to it, it's not about the quantity of Ted Kennedy's votes. It's about the quality of his politics. He really cares. He cares about people. He cares about the people who can't afford a lobbyist to stand out in the hallway and beg for a vote. He cares about the people who get up every morning and worry that nobody has noticed their lives, lives of sacrifice and lives of difficulty. He cares about those people. They won't be holding big fund-raisers with political action committees, but they are the people that have energized him in his public career.

He also cares about the people he works with. I can't think of another colleague that I've ever served with in the House or Senate who really reaches out so many different ways to each of us on a personal level to show that he cares. If you have a child in the hospital, an illness in the family, the loss of a loved one, you can count on a telephone call from Ted Kennedy. If no one else remembers, he will. He also works every single day.

I think that's the thing that surprised me in the ten years in the Senate, was just the energy level of Senator Ted Kennedy. He never stops. And now, in his majority position as chairman of the HELP Committee, he has an agenda he's been waiting for for way too long, an agenda which included increasing the minimum wage in America for the first

time in ten years, an agenda which is going to lead us into the kind of help for students across America to go to college that we haven't seen since the passage of the G.I. Bill after World War II. Time and time again this senator has used his commitment and combined it with an energy that has produced dramatic results.

I've had the honor of serving on the Judiciary Committee with him. I know that from time to time he stood up, taken a lonely and sometimes difficult political position for what he believed was right. It's that kind of courage and dedication to principle that leads me to believe he's one of the finest colleagues I've ever had the honor to serve with. Finally, he knows that life in the Senate here is a privilege. It's a privilege for each of us. Though he's been here longer than most, perhaps longer one other senator -- only one or senator, I should say, has been here longer -- he understands for each of us this is a great privilege for us to represent great states in a great nation.

It's a source of great pride for me to have once sat in that in that gallery as a college student and looked down on Senator Ted Kennedy on the floor wondering if I'd ever meet him, to be able to stand here today on the occasion of his 15,000th vote and to count him as a friend and as an inspiration.